

## CHAPTER XI

The Rostóvs' monetary affairs had not improved during the two years they had spent in the country.

Though Nicholas Rostóv had kept firmly to his resolution and was still serving modestly in an obscure regiment, spending comparatively little, the way of life at Otrádnoe—Míténka's management of affairs, in particular—was such that the debts inevitably increased every year. The only resource obviously presenting itself to the old count was to apply for an official post, so he had come to Petersburg to look for one and also, as he said, to let the lassies enjoy themselves for the last time.

Soon after their arrival in Petersburg Berg proposed to Véra and was accepted.

Though in Moscow the Rostóvs belonged to the best society without themselves giving it a thought, yet in Petersburg their circle of acquaintances was a mixed and indefinite one. In Petersburg they were provincials, and the very people they had entertained in Moscow without inquiring to what set they belonged, here looked down on them.

The Rostóvs lived in the same hospitable way in Petersburg as in Moscow, and the most diverse people met at their suppers. Country neighbors from Otrádnoe, impoverished old squires and their daughters, Perónskaya a maid of honor, Pierre Bezúkhov, and the son of their district postmaster who had obtained a post in Petersburg. Among the men who very soon became frequent visitors at the Rostóvs' house in Petersburg were Borís, Pierre whom the count had met in the street and dragged home with him, and Berg who spent whole days at the Rostóvs' and paid the eldest daughter, Countess Véra, the attentions a young man pays when he intends to propose.

Not in vain had Berg shown everybody his right hand wounded at Austerlitz and held a perfectly unnecessary sword in his left. He narrated that episode so persistently and with so important an air that everyone believed in the merit and usefulness of his deed, and he had obtained two decorations for Austerlitz.

In the Finnish war he also managed to distinguish himself. He had picked up the scrap of a grenade that had killed an aide-de-camp standing near the commander in chief and had taken it to his commander. Just as he had done after Austerlitz, he related this occurrence at such length and so insistently that everyone again believed it had been necessary to do this, and he received two decorations for the Finnish war also. In 1809 he was a captain in the Guards, wore medals, and held some special lucrative posts in Petersburg.

Though some skeptics smiled when told of Berg's merits, it could not be denied that he was a painstaking and brave officer, on excellent terms with his superiors, and a moral young man with a brilliant career before him and an assured position in society.

Four years before, meeting a German comrade in the stalls of a Moscow theater, Berg had pointed out Véra Rostóva to him and had said in German, “das soll mein Weib werden,” \* and from that moment had made up his mind to marry her. Now in Petersburg, having considered the Rostóvs’ position and his own, he decided that the time had come to propose.

\* “That girl shall be my wife.”

Berg’s proposal was at first received with a perplexity that was not flattering to him. At first it seemed strange that the son of an obscure Livonian gentleman should propose marriage to a Countess Rostóva; but Berg’s chief characteristic was such a naïve and good natured egotism that the Rostóvs involuntarily came to think it would be a good thing, since he himself was so firmly convinced that it was good, indeed excellent. Moreover, the Rostóvs’ affairs were seriously embarrassed, as the suitor could not but know; and above all, Véra was twenty-four, had been taken out everywhere, and though she was certainly good-looking and sensible, no one up to now had proposed to her. So they gave their consent.

“You see,” said Berg to his comrade, whom he called “friend” only because he knew that everyone has friends, “you see, I have considered it all, and should not marry if I had not thought it all out or if it were in any way unsuitable. But on the contrary, my papa and mamma are now provided for—I have arranged that rent for them in the Baltic Provinces—and I can live in Petersburg on my pay, and with her fortune and my good management we can get along nicely. I am not marrying for money—I consider that dishonorable—but a wife should bring her share and a husband his. I have my position in the service, she has connections and some means. In our times that is worth something, isn’t it? But above all, she is a handsome, estimable girl, and she loves me....”

Berg blushed and smiled.

“And I love her, because her character is sensible and very good. Now the other sister, though they are the same family, is quite different—an unpleasant character and has not the same intelligence. She is so... you know?... Unpleasant... But my fiancée!... Well, you will be coming,” he was going to say, “to dine,” but changed his mind and said “to take tea with us,” and quickly doubling up his tongue he blew a small round ring of tobacco smoke, perfectly embodying his dream of happiness.

After the first feeling of perplexity aroused in the parents by Berg’s proposal, the holiday tone of joyousness usual at such times took possession of the family, but the rejoicing was external and insincere. In the family’s feeling toward this wedding a certain awkwardness and constraint was evident, as if they were ashamed of not having loved Véra sufficiently and of being so ready to get her off their hands. The old count felt this most. He would probably have been unable to state

the cause of his embarrassment, but it resulted from the state of his affairs. He did not know at all how much he had, what his debts amounted to, or what dowry he could give Véra. When his daughters were born he had assigned to each of them, for her dowry, an estate with three hundred serfs; but one of these estates had already been sold, and the other was mortgaged and the interest so much in arrears that it would have to be sold, so that it was impossible to give it to Véra. Nor had he any money.

Berg had already been engaged a month, and only a week remained before the wedding, but the count had not yet decided in his own mind the question of the dowry, nor spoken to his wife about it. At one time the count thought of giving her the Ryazán estate or of selling a forest, at another time of borrowing money on a note of hand. A few days before the wedding Berg entered the count's study early one morning and, with a pleasant smile, respectfully asked his future father-in-law to let him know what Véra's dowry would be. The count was so disconcerted by this long-foreseen inquiry that without consideration he gave the first reply that came into his head. "I like your being businesslike about it.... I like it. You shall be satisfied...."

And patting Berg on the shoulder he got up, wishing to end the conversation. But Berg, smiling pleasantly, explained that if he did not know for certain how much Véra would have and did not receive at least part of the dowry in advance, he would have to break matters off.

"Because, consider, Count—if I allowed myself to marry now without having definite means to maintain my wife, I should be acting badly...."

The conversation ended by the count, who wished to be generous and to avoid further importunity, saying that he would give a note of hand for eighty thousand rubles. Berg smiled meekly, kissed the count on the shoulder, and said that he was very grateful, but that it was impossible for him to arrange his new life without receiving thirty thousand in ready money. "Or at least twenty thousand, Count," he added, "and then a note of hand for only sixty thousand."

"Yes, yes, all right!" said the count hurriedly. "Only excuse me, my dear fellow, I'll give you twenty thousand and a note of hand for eighty thousand as well. Yes, yes! Kiss me."